

Report from Employment Plank
Washington State Summit of Mental Health Consumers & Survivors
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The Employment Plank began their meeting with a brainstorming discussion around issues of concern and needs related to employment and mental health consumers. Issues that were brought forth include:

- SSI/SSD benefits and supports available in the ‘meantime’ – supports are needed *before* individuals are completely disabled; Benefits equal a barrier to employment (i.e. there is a fear of losing benefits)
- Training on benefits is needed throughout the process (of employment services)
- Expert advising/counseling (e.g. in the form of Benefits Coordinators/Counselors) throughout the process of seeking, obtaining, retaining employment
- Awareness of Plan to Work program – expanding, increased number of available Benefits Planning staff statewide
- Alternatives to DVR funding – it’s not stable enough; Improved DVR/MHD coordination
- DVR only helps most severely disabled; people who *could* work are not even eligible for, let alone receive, DVR services (need to revisit policies)
- Form partnerships with private industry: a publicity plan, education, dialogue on “reasonable accommodations,” clear expectations for businesses and for consumers/employees on what reasonable accommodations are, what ADA means
- Re: benefits specialists – increase training, peer involvement; what supports can be created for those who are not on Medicaid? (could be part of their training); Consumer run programs and self help programs could be promoted more (as places where consumers access trained benefits counselors, those who are peers, etc.)
- Program being in the Medicaid system – need more self supporting organizations, systems for those who might be out of the system but still need supports
- Need commitment for service entities that consumer get support throughout the continuum – is the stressor the job? Is another intervention/solution needed? This is in part a billing issue – need MH centers to be flexible enough to give those ongoing services throughout the continuum of needs for someone with whom they’ve already worked (not having to find new service entities just because consumer is “ok”)
- Need computer programs and training for consumers that are self-paced, online courses, availability of computers and other hardware (Community Access to Technology)
- Help for people who have not worked in a while; there will be gaps in employment and internship and volunteer experience and opportunities could help with the transition
- Training on how to even answer interview questions or illustrate on a resume, otherwise explain these gaps in employment
- Temporary employment should be an option, too; Maybe establish some sort of central agency that places consumers in various non-permanent jobs; could be tied to clubhouses or even a consumer-run entity that is that central clearing house for consumers to access these kinds of employment opportunities

- Includes job shadowing, mentoring, and supported employment
- The goal is competitive, living wage earning potential/employment
- Coordination of benefits and income (i.e. true Benefits Coordination expert working with the consumer on an individual basis)

Outcome # 1: Counselors are trained in full spectrum of issues, training to include private insurance benefits

Strategies/Next Steps:

1. Consumers across WA have access to and utilize Supported Employment services, to include benefits and counseling services

Measurement: 10% increase each year in the number of consumers who regularly access and utilize these services

Outcome # 2: The number of consumers who are “substantially” employed across WA (is increased)

Strategies/Next Steps:

1. “Choose, get, keep” model
 - supported employment actually happens
 - self help options (e.g. agency supported, consumers graduate)

Measurement: At the end of the 5 year period, a 10% increase in the number of consumers in WA who are “substantially employed”

Outcome # 3: Increase options for funding all job support services

Strategies/Next Steps:

1. Alternatives to DVR monies exist
2. Coordination between MHD/DVR on ability to fund job services is critical

Outcome # 4: Expand partnership with private industry so employees and employers better understand ADA

Strategies/Next Steps:

1. Develop a “statewide private industry partnership” plan (strategic plan)

Measurement: The existence of a strategic plan for private industry partnership